

## **How Asset Management Works**

Wokingham's highway maintenance programmes are based on an asset management approach. Asset management involves using robust data to make good, informed decisions about how we manage and maintain the asset (in this case, the highway network) as effectively as possible. The benefits of this approach are now widely recognised. National Government, have stressed the importance of highway asset management in order to deliver some of the required public-sector efficiencies and nearly all local highway authorities now either have an asset management plan or are actively working on one.

It is an approach which focuses on getting the best long-term value for money as opposed to a short-term approach which might prioritise immediate repairs over preventative work to preserve the asset and extend its life. Because we look at the long-term impact of our decisions, we do not simply prioritise our programmes based on what appears to be most pressing at the moment but rather we look to pick the best package of works mixing preventative works and remediation works, which, within the available budget, will give us the best long term result for the network.

What this means for road maintenance is that we consider over a much longer term all the roads in the borough in relation to one another when deciding which ones to maintain or repair first, rather than automatically fixing the roads which look worst. This enables us to make the best use of the limited resources we have but sometimes causes confusion when people see us performing preventative treatments on roads that appear to be in better condition than some others.

Since our programmes are limited by the available budget, each pound we spend on a particular road is a pound that is not available to be spent elsewhere. It is not, therefore, simply a case of selecting the 'best' treatment for a particular road, we have to select the most cost-effective treatment for that road - they are sometimes the same thing, but not always. If a low-cost option will significantly delay the need for more expensive repairs, then it deserves serious consideration even if a more expensive option would deliver a wider range of benefits.

For example, when looking at four roads in a particular area, we may find one road in a really bad condition and three other roads in a slightly better condition – not yet 'bad' but, perhaps, vulnerable if we should have another period of severe weather. Within the set budget available to us we have to decide whether to spend all our money on fixing the worst road (and let the other three roads continue to deteriorate into a worse condition) or whether to spend the minimum amount necessary to keep the worst road in a safe condition and invest the remaining budget in preventative maintenance works on the three vulnerable roads to protect them and stop them deteriorating into the same poor condition as the first road. Preventative maintenance is usually cheaper, so we can often maintain three or four roads for the price of fixing one bad one. This holistic viewpoint is part of our asset management approach.

## **Road Condition**

We have a large number of roads and maintaining them is a significant task. All roads need maintenance work from time to time and we have invested significant funds over recent years to maintain and improve their condition and build resilience. However, several recent severe winters have accelerated the rate at which roads need such work and this means that we have to make difficult decisions as to how to use the limited financial resources that are available to us and balance that with our duty to keep the highway safe for all users.

Wokingham does have an ongoing programme of works to maintain its roads and, in order to maximise the benefit gained from the available funds, the Borough Council has adopted an asset management approach (see above).

The condition of every public road in Wokingham is surveyed annually using machines and inspectors accredited to industry standards. The results of these surveys are fed into a specially developed software provided by a respected third party software vendor which looks at current condition, likely future deterioration, usage, hierarchy, traffic, location etc., and suggests a programme of work to extend the life of the whole road network. Our engineers then develop and refine the programme combined with any additional data from safety inspections, fault reporting and other enquiries if relevant.

The programme is matched to the maintenance budget available and, since we cannot do everything that we would like to do all at once, we give priority to those projects which give the best long-term value based on the factors mentioned above. Other factors such as upcoming development or utility work may mean works are moved to accommodate this as well as trying to combine works in similar locations to take advantage of the road space. We would feel inappropriate to spend money reconstructing a road if we are aware that a third party or developer shortly plans to deconstruct it. We would rather wait until third parties are finished

The overall programme of road maintenance forms part of our Road Maintenance Campaign for highway works for the following year and a list of probable schemes for the subsequent years. We currently publish a one-year works programme for highway works. Although we consider potential works further into the future, these programmes are not yet firm enough for publication and our annual condition surveys can easily and regularly affect our view of works far into the future as not all roads deteriorate in a constant and equal fashion.